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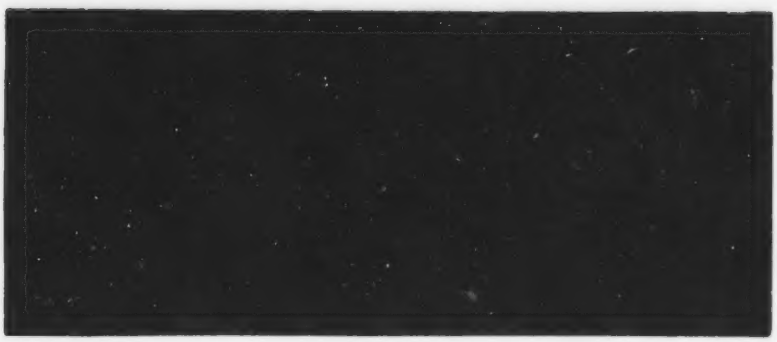

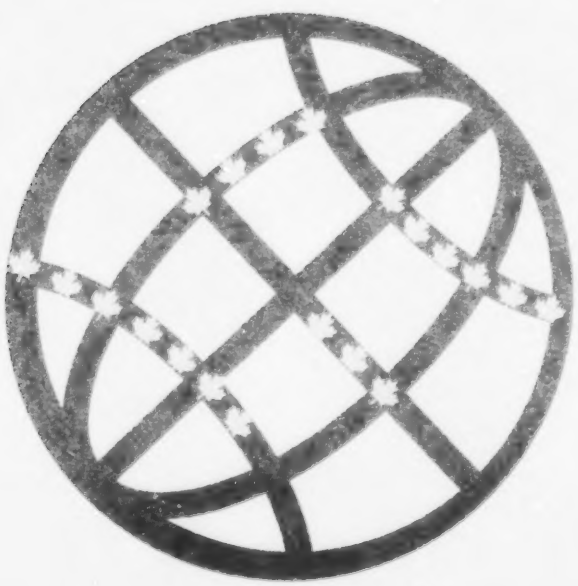

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STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY IN MEXICO: "FROM CLIENTALISM TO CITIZENSHIP"

May 1997

Dr. John W. Foster

STRENTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY IN MEXICO
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A paper prepared for the
John Holmes Fund of the
Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development

by Dr. John W. Foster
May, 1997

FOREWORD

Method

This brief paper is based on interviews and a limited literature review of issues relating to the situation of civil society in contemporary Mexico and more generally in Latin America. The author undertook more than 40 interviews (see Appendix III) during visits to Mexico City, and the states of Morelos, Oaxaca, Tabasco and Veracruz, and during participation at the Latin American Regional Consultation of CIVICUS, in Cartagena, Colombia. Interviews with individuals from Guanajuato, Guererro, the State of Mexico, Sinaloa and Tamaulipas were undertaken in Mexico City and Cartagena.

Through the kind invitation of members of the governing council of El Barzon, the author took part in community meetings of members of the organization in *ejidos* at La Gloria in northern Oaxaca and in the regions of Minatitlan and Hidalgotitalan in Eastern Veracruz. The author also had the opportunity to participate in a Cuernavaca workshop presented by the authors of the new book Ni Paz Ni Justicia, Marina Patricia Jimenez, Fr. Julian and Fr. Juan Sainz O.P., of the Centro de Derechos Humanos "Fray Bartolome de Las Casas", Chiapas, and in an NGO seminar on the first years of the NAFTA held at the Convento el Carmen in Mexico City.

The author was a participant in the Latin American Regional Consultation of CIVICUS, Cartagena. Colombia, an organization dedicated to strengthening civil society. The meeting provided an opportunity to participate in current Latin America-wide discussions regarding civil society, to hear comparative presentations and to discuss the role of multilateral organizations in reinforcing civil society.

A note on notes

To aid in brevity and readability footnotes are bracketed in abbreviated form at the point of reference. A bibliography with full titles listed in alphabetical order by author is found in Appendix II. The paper is informed in many aspects by the interviews and site visits undertaken by the author. Where direct or near-direct quotation is involved the source is indicated by number (Interview X), and a numbered list of interviewees is found in Appendix III.

Thanks

The author wishes to thank the John Holmes Fund of the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development for its financial support of the research for this paper and the staff of the Centre for its encouragement and advice.

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Members of the staff of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and of the Canadian Embassy in Mexico were very helpful, including: Real Boivin, Alan Culham, Nick Coglin, Michael Small, Brian Stevenson and Claudia Vega. Mr. Douglas Williams of the Policy Division of CIDA also provided useful advice.

The Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies of the University of California provided a variety of supports and encouragements to this project and I wish to thank the Center and its Director, Prof. Kevin Middlebrook.

Limits and limitations

This paper is a survey based on an intense but brief period of investigation. It deals with an exploding universe of activity in a vast nation more than three times the population of Canada. It's findings are therefore initial, general and more tentative than might be the result of a more thorough study, such as the three-year effort being undertaken currently as part of the Johns Hopkins Institute of Policy Studies.

A note on some of the current studies of civil society under way in Mexico or by the aegis of multilateral bodies and foreign foundations is found in Appendix I.

The paper does not claim to represent the opinions or policy recommendations of Canadian civil society organizations or philanthropic bodies engaged with Mexico, although its findings might contribute or spark such a policy concensus.

The paper is written during a pre-electoral period of debate, change and unpredictability in Mexico. As the development of civil society in a process of democratization is politically conditioned, the conclusions should be reviewed in the light of the balance of forces and responses which emerge from the July 6 mid-term elections.

The author is prepared to comment on possible next steps, in the light of the findings and recommendations of the current essay.

The author is grateful for all the advice and assistance received, however, the conclusions and recommendations, the strengths and the weaknesses of the paper are his own.

Author

John W. Foster is an academic, policy commentator and administrator. From 1989-96 he was National Secretary (CEO) of OXFAM-Canada. From 1971-1989 he was a policy officer for the Division of Mission in Canada of the United Church of Canada. He has been a founder, board and executive member of a number of Canadian and international non-governmental bodies. As of August 1, 1997, he will take up responsibilities as Sallows Professor of Human Rights, College of Law, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon. The author has visited Mexico more than twenty times in recent years in pursuit of research and NGO objectives.

Assistants

Lucho Van Isschot is a graduate (M.A.) of Simon Fraser Universities specializing in Latin American Studies. He is a writer and editor with experience in Canadian relations with the Hemisphere.

Louise Casselman is a Canadian consultant and artist resident in Mexico City.

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A. OVERVIEW

A.1 SCENARIOS

Mass poverty in Mexico -- affecting up to twice the population of Canada -- is not only unjust but contributes to instability in North America. This is particularly the case for the United States, in terms of pressure of migration and context for the illegal trade in narcotics.

The demographic challenge facing Mexico and Mexican government will continue for the foreseeable future, increasing pressure for access to economic livelihood, resources and participation.

The process of decomposition of the Mexican dominant party/state system will likely continue at a greater or lesser rate, with potential for democratization on the one hand or further repression, suffering and chaos in the coming decade. The mid-term elections are likely to provide important indicators of the speed, extent and character of the process.

The level of corruption, fed by narcotic commerce, together with its attendant effects of violence, obfuscation and generalized criminal behavior, will continue to be a major obstacle to effective democratization, social peace and the rule of law, and an impediment to transparent commercial and diplomatic relations of confidence.

The extent and depth of environmental degradation continues despite improvement in the law and relative strengthening of environmental ngos and public consciousness. The extent of the threat is of significance from a global perspective -- rainforests, species, atmosphere, trade health and safety -- and is fed by marginalization and poverty at the bottom and corruption and lack of political will at the top.

The North American Free Trade Agreement will continue in existence, reinforcing trade and investment links and assisting wealth creation and accumulation for some. The economic crisis which came in its wake will continue to profoundly affect the majority of the Mexican population.

Canada has significant and growing economic interests in trade with and investment in Mexico, in the strengthening of civil society and democratic institutions in Mexico and in "balancing the relationship" with Mexico, that is reinforcing social, cultural, organization, aboriginal and other not strictly economic linkages with Mexico. It can be argued that Canada has an interest in reduced inequality and enhancement of basic needs for the Mexican poor majority, in terms of extending democracy, ensuring stability and expanding markets. Canada has an interest in protecting and recuperating the natural environment in Mexico as part of its global responsibility.

A short-term scenario

The highly-articulated struggle over the control of the state at national, state and municipal levels will continue. There is potential for positive experimentation with public participation in policy formation and government . There is also considerable potential for hard-line or "dinosaur" reactions in particular regions of Mexico or parts of the Federal government. The process of

militarization has continued with ominous potential for daily life and civilian control. The potential for further repression and violation of human rights continues.

The prospect of an historic alteration in the extent of direct political control by the dominant party -- through loss of the governorship of the Federal District, and/or loss of majority control in the Congress is a distinct possibility on July 6. This has indirect as well a direct implications, for civil society, as both the presence of an alternate party administration in a populous jurisdiction and the increased division of political power nationally, would appear to offer significantly more space and potential for autonomous civil organization.

Beyond the short-term

The loss for Federal political control by the traditional dominant party/state system (represented by the PRI) and/or its transfer to other hands, may lead in three years to one or a combination of new circumstances:

a) a decline into regional potentates or "war lords", with a few pockets of positive governance and a great deal of lost time and resources, likely continued marginalization of the majority, increased narcotization of the economy and politics.

b) a new federal government which faces considerable challenges in disciplining the state apparatus, faces continuing economic crises and is motivated to undertake a renewed development strategy dealing with the *campo* and the domestic market and in that light seeking a revision of the NAFTA and a renewed alliance for development.

c) a new federal government which continues the neoliberal approach to commerce of the PRI, encounters considerable resistance to the reform of corruption and faces increased domestic conflict with marginalized sectors.

d) more of the same.

Responding: grounding Canadian policy

Given these possibilities:

Canadian actions vis-a-vis civil society in Mexico should be aimed at decreasing official and institutional resistance to effective and democratic participation, increasing the organizational and institutional capacity of civil organizations to play and effective role in a democratic Mexico, and reinforcing and extending the elements of equity and environmental sustainability in the society.

In terms of overall arrangements with Mexico, Canada should be prepared to encourage the revision of the NAFTA in order to enhance and support the strengthening of civil society, including the development of more adequate environmental, labour and development financing agreements.

Canada's interests will be served in following this line of approach, not only because it coincides with Canadian values and Canadian commitment to democracy, because:

* **economic and political cooperation** in an increasingly complex and integrated framework will be best served by effective democracy, transparency and the rule of law in Mexico. Only a significant strengthening of autonomous civil society in Mexican can guarantee this outcome.

* **security** in North America will be improved by the accomplishment of a negotiated end to civil conflict in Mexico, increased governmental transparency and control over traffic in narcotics and increased equity contributing to a reduced pressure on migration.
* **environmental sustainability** will be enhanced by a strengthening of civil society and organizations of accountability and by the reduction of poverty.
* **social justice and human development** will be enhanced by the reduction of poverty and the strengthening of organizations of the poor and marginalized and their role in defining public policy.

A.2 POLICY SUMMARY

Orientation

Effective and enduring democratization in Mexico depends on a 'scaling up' of social capital, a reinforcing of civil society. In a society struggling to emerge from authoritarian control and characterized by chronic poverty and marginalization for a huge segment of a growing population, together with rampant degradation of the natural environment, an emphasis on strengthening autonomy and strengthening equity seeking organizations of the marginalized and the poor should have priority. The relief of poverty is normally a prerequisite of environmental security, nevertheless assistance in the relief of poverty should be undertaken with a priority dimension on stopping degradation and increasing recuperation of the natural heritage.

Canadian actions vis-à-vis civil society in Mexico should be aimed at increasing the organizational and institutional capacity of civil society organizations to plan an effective role in a democratic Mexico, decreasing institutional and governmental resistance to effective and democratic participation, increasing transparency and reinforcing and extending the elements of equity in the society.

In the immediate future, Canada should encourage both symbolic and substantive actions which legitimize civil society organizations and their contribution to democratic society and which encourage their further development. Encouraging change in the attitudes and actions of the Executive branch of the Mexican government, as well as taking advantage of openings in the Legislative process, are extremely important.

Canadian aid aimed at strengthening independent Mexican civil society organizations, whether direct or through Canadian NGOs, whether bilateral or through multilateral agencies should include an initial emphasis on strengthening Canadian/Mexican partnerships and on organizational development.

Canadian contributions to democratic civil society and equity in Mexico are far too limited to have a serious impact. Canada should develop a long term and substantial assistance programme aimed at the reduction of poverty and marginalization and the strengthening of civil society and democracy in Mexico.

As part of the preparation of such a cooperation arrangement, Mexican civil society organizations should be encouraged and supported, along with Canadian counterparts, in the assessment of needs, development of priorities and elaboration of plans and programmes.

SUMMARY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following specific policy recommendations are found in the text sections C, D & E.

1. Enhancing the legal framework: Information:

Mexican legislators and officials as well as philanthropic and non-governmental organizations have expressed interest in Canadian laws and regulations (regarding non-profit incorporation, charitable tax arrangements, etc.). A summary of legislation and practice could be shared, including comments on experience from such bodies as the Voluntary Sector Roundtable.

2 Advice and encouragement:

To what end should advice be offered? From the point of view of Mexican philanthropic and non-governmental bodies, three or four key points might be cited. Initiatives which should be considered include those:

1) that reinforce the idea that participation in formation and comment on legislation and in public planning, implementation and evaluation by organized civic associations is a normal, feasible and in fact advantageous to the process of effective governing.

2) that strengthen and professionalize civic associations will yield positive results in building national concensus.

3) that encourage laws and regulations governing the formation and operation of civic associations should be kept as simple, accessible and transparent as possible.

4) that reinforce those civic associations leading in these efforts, through bilateral relationships with Canadian organizations and through dialogues which bring together official, party/legislative, civil association and filanthropic figures around issues of reform and participation.

By what means should advice and encouragement be provided? Sensitivities at a state and individual level are important to keep in mind. The use of bilateral diplomatic, legislative and business conversations is important. The encouragement of governmental/NGO or legislative/NGO conversations as outlined below in section C.10 would contribute positively.

The support of specific meetings to review legal and procedural experience, involving Canadian and Mexican philanthropic and voluntary groups together with relevant government official or politicans would be useful.

3. Change the atmosphere for civil society organizations

3.1 Canada should strongly encourage Mexico to bring the situation of civil conflict and violence in Chaipas to a peaceful resolution through negotiations and implementation of the San Andres accords.

- The potential for a role for third parties, both state and non-state actors should be tested, including the possibility of the use of human rights monitors under international authority benefitting from the Central American experience.

3.2 In bilateral relations with Mexico, whether at the Executive or Legislative levels, Canada should discourage further extension of the role and power of the Mexican military in civilian life in Mexico.

3.3 Canada should review its support for the enhancement of human rights mechanisms in Mexico and bilateral cooperation, taking into account the demonstrated weaknesses of the CNDH, and devoting resources to other forms of improved respect for rights, in particular the strengthening of indpendent human rights bodies and networks at the state and federal level. The potential for encouraging a strengthened role for legislative bodies and potential bilateral collaboration at t that level should be reviewed following the mid-term congressional elections.

3.4 Canada should continue to encourage actions by the Canadian embassy and Canadian official visitors to Mexico which encourage the recognition of the legitimacy and roles of civil society organizations and their contribution to democracy, respect for the safety and integrity of human rights workers and which emphasize Canadian opposition to continued human rights violations.

4. Building equity in rural Mexico

A serious Canadian commitment to the defeat of poverty and growth of democratic civil society in Mexico should undertake a priority focus in rural development. The membership commitment, producer orientation and democratic autonomy of the AgroBarzon make it a strong candidate to be one of the organizations by which such an objective could be accomplished.

4.1 As part of the development of a Canadian assistance programme, with a focused effort on combatting rural poverty, support for the AgroBarzon through investment in organizational development and training enhancement for the organization at all levels, together with sustained support, in selected regions, for a programme of improved agricultural production with appropriate technical advice, surveys and support would be an excellent window for direct or indirect Canadian assistance.

5. Organizational development for autonomous unions

While the autonomy and independence of these syndical (Foro) and professional (Democratic Lawyers) is key, both sectors cite needs for increased capacity in training and professionalization, increased capacity for the promotion and defence of core labour rights as well as the capacity to monitor and evaluate compliance with national and international standards and agreements. Support for such capacity enhancement could be developed by the Canadian government in cooperation with Canadian labour bodies independant of or as part of an overall Canadian assistance plan for Mexico.

6. Building citizenship

As part of its support for democratization in Mexico and enhancement of the electoral process, Canada should provide support for the further development of the Alianza Civica, for pre-electoral studies, observation, voter-education and organizational development. In view of the current sensitivities of the Mexican government, such aid may best be delivered through Canadian non-governmental partners.

7. Modelling civil diplomacy and policy formation

7.1 The Canadian experience of public and non-governmental participation in foreign policy development -- as embodied in the Foreign Policy Review of the 1990s and the creation of the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development -- provides an experience which might well be

shared with Mexican government, politicians and NGOs. More concretely, Canada might support some pilot or model experiences in government/NGO dialogue with regard to multilateral agencies and foreign policy.

The objective of the activities would be to encourage greater respect and openness between Mexican officials and NGOs, while reinforcing Canadian/Mexican NGO and governmental understanding. If successful some concensus might emerge on key problematics facing government and NGOs alike and ways of dealing with them.

Three areas suggested in interviews for treatment in such four-way conversations are:
1) development, macro-economic policy and the role of International Financial Institutions.
2) law and participation, civil participation in law-making and law and regulation of civil society organizations
3) human rights and human rights organizations

Applying some aspects of the November, 1996 Aboriginal Economic Roundtable to the field of non-governmental relations and the state and responding to ideas of experienced Mexican and Canadian non-governmental bodies, roundtables (involving four or in some cases five sectors) might be organized.

In each case, with direct or indirect Canadian government support, a Canadian and a Mexican partner organization might be invited to convene and prepare a limited and invitational consultation and a consultative process (involving problem clarification, establishment of priorities for discussion and reference/preparatory material). Adequate financial support could ensure proper preparation, translation and reporting of the conversations.

8. Aid for equity and civil society
It is therefore incumbent that Canada move toward an assistance programme aimed at reducing poverty and increasing participation of the currently marginalized in all aspects of Mexican life.

Given the focus of this paper, the following suggestions for starting places would seem most appropriate:

* a process of programme development which involves and strengthens Mexican organizations as part of the planning and elaboration of the programme.
* a process which might begin with bringing consortia of Canadian and Mexican development organizations together to develop agreements and working rules of relationship and partnership, not unlike the carefully developed collaboration between Canadian and Cuban non-governmental organizations. Encouragement might be provided to incipient collaboration in social development between poor people's organizations in Mexico and Canada.
* initial elements of support for locally and partnership-sourced organizational development, training and capacity building of civil society organizations, ngos, etc. A priority should be support for the democracy-building activities of the Civic Alliance. The encouragement of democratic and independent trade unions is also important.

* initial elements of support for organizational development, training, development planning in independent agricultural organizations, particularly those involving small and small/medium holders.

Additional areas for consideration might include:
* participation in local/regional foundation-like funding institutions
* enhancement of women's economic participation, rural and urban
* building on the elements of partnership between Canadian and Mexican environmental organizations
* building on the elements of partnership between Canadian and Mexican aboriginal organizations

Planning for programme development should commence now with the objective of bringing some partnership, training and organizational development elements into being in 1998 and 1999 and being ready to announce an overall programme to commence the new millenium.

Whether a Canadian assistance programme dedicated to building equity in Mexican society and strengthening civil society should be seen as a modification of current ODA priorities or as an extension or modification of NAFTA and bilateral agreements is moot. The number of poor people in Mexico exceeds that in a number of other ODA-able regions, and their proximity not only in geographic and migration terms but in terms of Canadian interests is clear. At the same time the precedents in European and some other regional trade negotiations for assistance to poorer partners (so-called "southern tier") and for social development elements are also useful.

9. NAFTA: prepare for something new

Canada should provide support of independent and cross-sectoral discussions of the future enhancement of arrangements with a view to strengthen democratization, civil society participation and equity, accompanied by thorough cross-sectoral evaluations of the experience to date, would be a wise preparation for the coming decade in North America as well as for the broad FTAA discussions currently moving forward.

B. CONTEXT AND CIRCUMSTANCE

B.1 Renewed concern

"The good scenario is that we will soon face a challenge much more severe than the peso crisis...[the] bad scenario is that 'no true crisis will emerge.'" Antonio Alonso Concheiro to Robert D. Kaplan. (Kaplan, "History...", p. 22)

The mid-term mark in the Zedillo *sexenio* - punctuated by congressional and, most notably, the path-breaking election of a governor for the Federal District - has been noted in a spate of articles and reviews of the state of Mexico's union and implications for the United States, if not Canada. Robert D. Kaplan in "History moving north" (The Atlantic Monthly, February, 1997) describes state failure, the emergence of three Mexicos and the cathartic need for crisis to free Mexico and move it ahead. Denise Dresser "Mexico: Uneasy, Uncertain, Unpredictable" (Current History, February, 1997) looks at Mexico in the wake of "economic meltdown", the "schizophrenic and ofen contradictory" record of President Zedillo, the renewed appearance of militarized opposition groups and the need to confront the brutal disparities which divide Mexicans with more inclusive economic reforms and inclusive political modernization. Elizabeth Palmer, "Trouble in Paradise" in Canadian Living (Toronto, March, 1997) uses Acapulco and the state of Guerrero as a window on corruption, poverty, violence and civil conflict. A number of authors contribute to a wide-ranging review "Contesting Mexico" (NACLA: Report on the Americas, Jan/Feb, 1997), examines the effect of Mexico's ceding economic and political power to forces outside Mexico, the crisis in legitimacy of the PRI, and the development of social and political forces for change beyond the immediate reach of the current party/state system. Two recently published specific studies should also be mentioned. Heather L. Williams, Planting Trouble: The Barzon Debtors Movement in Mexico, (San Diego, 1996) surveys the mercurial growth and force of the movement of producers against the banking system, usury and debt. Andrew Reding, World Policy Journal, New York, Fall, 1996 examines the populism of Vicente Fox' PAN administration in Guanajuato indicating the potential it may have for more open government in Mexico. The significant changes in Mexico's authoritarian regime have been reviewed by a wide variety of authors among them Wayne A. Cornelius, Mexican Politics in Transition: The Breakdown of a One-Party-Dominant Regime. Monograph Series No. 41, (San Diego, 1996), and Judith Teichman, "Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Mexican Authoritarianism", CERLAC Working Paper Serioes Number 6 (York University, 1996). Finally there are those who are attempting to keep up with the emerging scope of the detritis of the Salinas years. Although it is preliminary and not equal to the flood of arcane detail and titillating accusation currently occupying front pages in Mexico, a starting place is Alma Guillermoprieto's "Murder, Mexico and the Salinas Brothers" in The New York Review of Books (October 3, 1996). The arguments were taken forward dramatically in Neill Docherty's excellent Fifth Estate (CBC/PBS, April, 1997) of the story of Raoul Salinas and his Presidential brother.

What is common about most, if not all, of these works is that the nature of the authoritarian state/party system in Mexico is in transformation and crisis; that neoliberal economic reforms while contributing to that crisis have also radically exascerbated social and economic polarities in Mexico; that the state/party apparatus has been undermined by its own corruption, not least in

engagement in the extensive trade in drugs, which extends to the security forces at virtually all levels; and that the crisis in the economy and in legitimacy has renewed and reinforced a variety of forces for change within and far beyond the state which make concensus extremely difficult to achieve, are expressed in simmering and often violent civil conficts in a number of states, and which have the potential to explode and and undermine order and confidence still further. In terms of everyday life the sense of insecurity is embodied in a rising crime rate, sections of the country where kidnappings for ransom are endemic and a difused sense of increased violence and threat of violence, symbolized by the increased presence of the military in various parts of the land.

B. 2 Current Context

This authors brief exploration of five Mexican states (including the Federal District) and review of the Mexican daily press for a month yielded the following global highlights of the current moment in Mexico:

* *the 'telenovela'*: who needs fiction when magic realism unfolds daily in the press, television and in courts in Texas. The unsolved murder of former Guererro state governor, PRI Secretary General and former brother-in-law of the President, Jose Francisco Riuz Massieu, the engagement of his brother, former Attorney General, Mario Riuz Massieu, in illicit profits from the drug trade, the alleged involvement of ex-President Salinas' brother Raul in the murder, the accusations of his ex-secretary and his father's ex-secretary about family engagement in the drug trade and the relationship of all this to the wealth, power and corporate manipulations of ex-President Carlos Salinas while in and out of power, are a fairly constant feature of the daily media in Mexico. The effect is not only to make the exiled President an unpopular and "seriously flawed" figure, but to deeply undermine confidence in his successor and most of those governing the state/party structure. The matter remains current with the revelation that the U.S. Justice Department is investigating Raoul Salinas and others on charges of money laundering and the use of Mexican government institutions for that purpose.

* *the drug trade and the crisis around "certification"*: U.S. fixation with its drug problem and the international implications of its drug policy together with the loud echoes from Congressional posturing and threats on all sides kept the Mexican press, government and legislature in turmoil for several weeks. Accusations in the New York Times about the drug trade involvements of two state governors (Sonora and Morelos), cessions of Mexican sovereignty permitting freer access and activity by U.S.D.E.A. agents on Mexican soil and the upswell of interest in the Texas-based trial of Mario Riuz Massieu combined to keep the pot boiling. Symbolic of the depth of corruption was the escape of a leading narcotrafficker who simply seems to have worked out of police custody, a couple of hours before President Clinton's announcement of Mexican certification, and the arrest of first one and then another prominent General for engagement in the trade. The loud debate over certification and its implications -- including injury to Mexican sovereignty and national pride -- from time to time touched not only on the peculiar schizophrenia of U.S. concern with Mexico, but on the seemingly useless existence of the NAFTA agreements. While the latter might be understood to be the beginning of a new relationship of confidence and respect, the U.S. certification debate indicated no respect, little understanding and little affection for Mexico. The passing of the certification moment, no more than the visit of President Clinton

to Mexico in May, failed to end this aspect of crisis. New accusations of the involvement of Mexican diplomatic and military figures in the export of a "ton"of cocaine in mid-May kept the flow of dirty water in full flood.

* *the desintegration of military credibility*: the arrest (February 8) of the newly-appointed head of the Mexican National Institute for the Combat against Drugs (INCD), General Jose de Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo, for protecting the most notorious of Mexico's drug traders -- the "Lord of the Skies" Amado Carillo Fuentes -- was given piquante detail by the revelation that the General was the beneficiary of a luxurious Lomas de Chapultepec apartment not only owned by Carillo, but just a few floors away from the apartment of the "Lord" himself. The charges outlined a network of relationships which involved the military and the drug traffic in such states as Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Nayarit, Jalisco, Sonora, Durango and Baja California. The disappearance of a leading government official, the load bleatings of the Times-accused governors of Sonora and Morelos and the arrest of a further military leader in March, did little to patch the credibility of the government or the military.

This festering outgrowth at the top combines with a fear and disrepect for the military as it extends its presence at community level in both city and countryside. To the widespread belief that the police are involved in crime, habitually intimidating, corrupt and violent, is added the conviction that the military act with impunity and for profit. Many fear a larger role for the army, already being implemented. As Robert Kaplan describes the potential, if not for violence then for profit "given the pervasiveness of narcontics money in the economy, the Mexican army, with its airplanes and high-tech communications gear, would simply become the world's most formidable drug dealer." (Kaplan, "History..., p. 24)

* *the economy after meltdown:* Mexico is far from monolithic, its economy characterized by very uneven rates of development. The peso crisis and the actions which contributed to it had significant winners and losers, the implementation of the NAFTA has benefited the growth of signfiicant sectors of export-oriented manufacturing while decimating other producers. Whether in the manipulation of massive privatization schemes or in the phenomenally risky and ultimately disastrous issue of *tesobonos* during the Salinas government, there were Mexican -- an often foreign -- investors who benefitted royally, while majority wages plumetted in value. From the point of view of the historians of Mexico's foreign debt, the 1994-95 crisis was something new on the global scene, full of portents for the future of the highly integrated global financial system. For the purposes of this paper, however, its importance is in demonstrating the chronically unequal effects of the policies implemented by the Salinas and presently the Zedillo governments together with the apparent inability of these policies to address and correct historic inequalities in Mexican society.

* *the marginalized 50%:* Mexico has been chronically subject to inequality and appears to have had a greater concentration of income sixty years after the revolution than it had in 1910. (Cornelius, Mexican..., p. 100) While poverty was reduced from 1963 to 1981, it increased between 1982 and 1992, with the proportion of the population classified as poor rising to 66%. Between 1979 and 1989 the incidence of severe malnutrition among rural children increased by 100 percent. Other indicators of persistent impoverishment included 46% rate of school drop-out in elementary education, and roughly 50 percent of dwellings lacking either piped water and sewer connections. Seventy percent of those classified as living in extreme poverty live in rural Mexico. By 1990 the percentage of people living below a mere subsistance level (equivalent to two official minimum salaries) ranged from 40 percent in Baja California to 80 percent in Chiapas. The effect of the economic crisis of the mid-nineties on an already poor population has not yet been adequately dealt with. The value of the official minimum salary has been reduced by more than 60% since the beginning of the decade.

* *the increase in generalized violence and insecurity:* As one community human rights centre described the local atmosphere: "Untimately, for many people, the sense of insecurity is not so much the gangs of organized delinquents (drug-dealers, professional kidnappers, assaulting gangs), nor the impunity of high politicians, nor the corruption of the police, but the daily violence which hits the common citizen with greater frequency: house-breakings, physical aggression, assaults..."

* *democratization and politics in 1997*: Wayne Cornelius (Cornelius, Mexican politics....) outlines two scenarios for Zedillo, one in which enlightened reform will yield increased public suport and greater power to discipline unruly elements of the official party, another in which a weak President will leave power vacuums permitting party "dinosaurs" and regional caciques increased sway, frustrating reformist elements and further frittering away public support, perhaps leading to the loss of majority control in the Congress in the 1997 midterm elections.

The evidence in February/March yields increasing credibility to the second, and in Cornelius' view, the more pessimistic scenario. The President's role is a vacillating one, as Dresser points out, initiating reforms and then backing off. The Mexico City election for the PRI has been put in the hands of one of the party's chief manipulators, Carlos Hank Gonzalez, and its candidate is read by many as a symbol of the dinosaurs. The influence of hard-line minister, Chauffet is also cited as indicative of a renewal of the power of the old authoritarians as the PRI comes under increasing threat. The cession of local -- the ex-Mayor of the Tabasco town of Cardenas, state - Layla Sansores -- daughter of a PRI state Governor and now PRD candidate for Governor of Campeche, and federal PRI leaders, primarily with options for the PRD, is reminiscent of the initial split nine years ago which led to the Cardenas candidacy in 1988 and the formation of the PRD by Cardenas, Munoz Ledo, Castillo and others shortly thereafter.

The PRI is in serious danger of losing two key bases of continuing power: the government of the capital, the Federal District and the 42% necessary to ensure its continued overall majority in the Congress. Those who favor alternation of parties in power, or decentralization or reduced executive authority do not view these possibilities as alarming or negative. The results of the local and state congress elections in Morelos in March -- which brought the PAN to municipal power in Cuernavaca, and the PRD to municipal power for the majority of the state including the city of Cuauhtla, were hailed by the President as evidence of the strength of democracy and by the opposition as portents of greater change.

At the same time, while the Federal mid-term, D.F. and other state gobernatorial elections have considerable portent for the Zedillo administration and the shape of politics through the year 2000, it should be kept in mind that there are significant areas where the elections have little apparent importance for people and where the absention rate is extremely high. In communities visited in Oaxaca for example, abstention could be more than 60% and indigenous people find the whole exercise distant if not dangerous.

At the Federal level, in the capital, and in state capitals, the political atmosphere is highly charged. Some expect the civic and national elections to be inordinately "dirty", others see history unfolding as it should. In the states, particularly but not only in the south, assasination of opposition (particularly PRD) leaders and activists continues. Threats, press attacks, poster campaigns are aimed at all those assumed to be threatening the state/party system: the Civic Alliance, human rights and environmental advocates, progressive religious figures, etc. The increased presence and role of the military simply underline the continued and often urgent concern for human rights.

Meanwhile, the growth of relatively independent mass-based social organizations -- the trade union foro, the Barzon, the Civic Alliance and certain indigenous organizations -- and their relationship with politics should also be kept in mind in evaluating sources of renewal, new concensus or new ideas. The adherence of a number of the natural leaders of the Barzon to the electoral cause of the PRD is a case in point. The public adhesion to the PAN of Julio Faesler a leader in the effort to clarify the legal situation of civic associations is another case in point.

As for the official party, one metaphor might be that of a huge, well-fed, aged but highly capable mammoth, which is suffering a debilitating and probably fatal disease. Its motor control is out of whack, its intelligence in conflict with its diminishing ability to coordinate its huge extent, certain of its organs malfunctioning in a toxic fashion, it seems to be losing body parts, but overall still huge, resourceful and capable of doing a great deal of damage as it stumbles about.

C. CIVIL SOCIETY IN MEXICO

C.1 A matter in question

It is in this turbulent context that current debates about the role and future of civil society, and particularly of organized civil society take place. The discussion is frought with conflict and debate, and occurs in an atmosphere of suspicion and, on occasion, threat and fear, characteristic of a monolithic system in a period of dis-integration. Two current works on civil society, Vicente Arredondo Ramirez, by the director of a small foundation, DEMOS, in his 1996 book Harcia una Nueva Cultural Ciudadana en Mexico, sees in the renewal and extension of active citizenship and organized civil society, the potential for a redefined social contract in Mexico. Government should facilitate the development of a society ready to manage itself. A much less optimistic view is put forward by Sergio Zermeno, in La Sociedad Derrotada: El desorden mexicano del fin de siglo, who sees a profound gap opened up between that portion of the state/party system and economic leadership which are integrating themselves thoroughly in a globalized and globalizing agenda and moving further and further from a marginalized majority in civil society at home. Confronted by the thorny threats of individualism, vandalism, the fight of all against all, he appeals to a renewed sense of cooperativism whether in industrial or neighborhood settings and a rebirth of a utopian vision, but one capable of projecting a sustainable economic and social future in a heterogenous metropolis as well as a rural forest. (Zermeno, La Sociedad..., pp. 230-32)

Zermano describes four Mexicos which now contend with each other in the wake of the process of modernization and globalization:
transnational Mexico: the modernizing Mexico, engaged with international capital and quite flimsy in a number of aspects.
modern Mexico: side by side with transnational Mexico, the one being dismantled as the other develops.
broken (torn) Mexico: much below the others in terms of levels of income and opportunities to participate.
deep Mexico: the Mexico which rebelled in Chiapas, taking hold of its roots in order to confron a future of even greater decomposition, and knowing that nothing about it interests transnational Mexico except its cadaver, its disappearance. (Zermeno, La Sociedad... ,p.15)

What is common in both these works is the assumption that only with the effective participation of civil society can ways be found out of Mexico's extremely pressing social, economic and political challenges. Zermeno is perhaps more driven by the great potential for disintegration and and the possibility of failure. (there appear to be those who yearn for further disintegration, including Antonio Alonso Concheiro, referred to by Robert D. Kaplan, who hopes for a crisis that will bring greater power and resources to "local bosses and free-enterprise networks".(Kaplan, History.... p. 22)

C. 2 From clientalism to citizenship: building blocks of civil society

The essential challenge at the current moment in Mexico has been well put by UCSC Professor Jonathon Fox. Buildinr Jonathan Fox. Building block organizations of an autonomous civil society requires the development of "social capital" through a variety of models. The inter-action of local actors, the support or encouragement of those actors by the state at any level, collaboration with external actors are all possible. The space provided by divisions in authoritarian structures is also key. (Fox, "How..., and Fox, "The difficult...)

As Fox points out in a study of democratization in Mexico, elections are but the tip of the ice berg. The key issue in a society trying to break deep habits of clientalism and control, is the issue of autonomy. He posits that a key building block of democratization in contemporary Mexico is "respect for associational autonomy, which allows citizens to organize in defense of their own interests and identities without fear of external intervention or punishment." (Fox, "The difficult..., pp. 151-152.)

Given the delayed but considerable potential for political change and space presented by electoral alternation at the municipal and state level in sizeable parts of the country and the potential for some further opening at the Federal level, the late nineties present considerable opportunity for a strengthening of autonomous civil society organizations.

State actors at any level can both encourage the development of community organizations, as in the formation of Community Food Councils in the early 1980s, and can assist by offsetting the disincentives or repressive tendencies of other state actors. The potential for reaction by threatened elements is always present, as in the ongoing conflict in Chiapas or the history of assassination of local and regional opposition political leaders in the early nineties.

External actors -- overseas assistance agencies, foundations and non-governmental bodies -- can be important allies in the growth of autonomy.

The scale and complexity of the organizations is another key to autonomy, and Fox argues for a considerable "scaling up" of social organizations if they are to survive the attacks of hostile state or other elements. Such a scaling up, or "thickening" of social organizations may include the encouragement of horizontal links across regions or states, building resilient national organizations and the development of leadership and membership capacities. It also depends on experience, particularly the shared experience of collective action. The potential for such experience often depends on the relatively absence of fear or direct repression, something which may be momentary and is politically conditioned. As Fox concludes "densely woven social fabrics can be unraveled by state-sanctioned coercion, on the one hand, while external allies from either state or society can help to weave or reweave them on the other." (Fox, "How...", p. 1098)

If Canada is seriously committed to democratization and the growth of civil society in Mexico, there is considerable scope for the role of external actor, however carefully it must be developed.

While Mexico's development of civil organizations and ngos has been later than that in many other Latin American countries, it is none the less central to the issue of democratization today. Latin American and Mexican interest in the dynamics and potential of civil society is growing, in part encouraged by multilateral agencies and funding bodies, but also in response to obvious growth in activity at the community and national levels. (see Appendix I on studies).

C. 3 Background: a steep climb

The Mexican Center for Philanthropy (CEMEFI) has been working hard on the question of legal framework for civil associations. As their staff pointed out, Mexico has a long history of private non-profit organizations stretching back to the Hospital de Jesus founded in Cortez time in 1524. A long history, but not a strong one. Organizations associated with the Church or after the reforms of Benito Juarez in the 1860s, of a secular nature, and dedicated to public assistance, health and education have had a significant role in Mexican history, but in a context, particularly after the revolution, of extensive state presence, activity and authority. Presently their legal expression is a Institutions of Public Assistance (IAPs). (Interviews: 9, 14, 28)

A former prominant actor in government warned that one must remember that Mexico society and the state/party system are "brutally corporatist". The forms were established when there was virtually no middle class, and the Mexican middle-class was late and weak in development. There were, until quite recently, to all intents and purposes, no political parties outside the dominant state/party. (Inteview 28)

The student rebellion and the massacre of Tlatelolco in 1968 is referred to by some as the birth moment of a civil society in the modern sense in Mexico. Others relate it to the emergency of middle class values as a significant reference point in the late 1970s. The government responded with the rhetoric of participation but did little.

It should be kept in mind that the government had an extensive family of party and programme related social movements which were part of the legacy of the era of Lazaro Cardenas and succeeding administrations in the 30s and 40s. These peasant, labour and poor-peoples mass organizations were instrumental parts of the party/state system providing credibility, leadership formation and intimidating political clout.

Non-governmental organizations as understood in a number of northern countries emerged, according to Fox and Hernandez, often in association with development projects related to the social mission of the Roman Catholic church in the 1950s and 1960s. With the influence of liberation theology and conscientizacion these groups mushroomed in the 1970s, with extensive work in popular education. A number of the groups which emerged gained foreign funding and worked in development and educational projects. But NGOs are not equivalent to social movements and the relationship between the two organizational forms have undergone a series of sometimes rough transformations in the past twenty years. However, in August 1990, a process of convergeance among NGOs and some related movements gave birth to the "Convergeance of Democratic Civic Organizations for Democracy". (Hernandez and Fox, "Mexico's..., p. 200)

The earthquake of 1985 is used by almost all commentators as a marker of the emergency of a new era of active and life among civil organizations. "Neither the government nor the community organizations of the ruling PRI proved capable of organizing rescue actions, post-earthquake relief or housing reconstruction. Representative of groups emerging at this time was the urban popular movement, which became in 1987 the Asamblea de Barrios or Assembly of Neighborhoods, in Mexico City. (NACLA , "Contesting..., p. 19) In the opinion of a long-term bureaucrat what distinguished the organizations which emerged at this time was autonomy, they were, in his words, "barbarously anti-government." (Interview 28)Alternatively as Fox and Hernandez put it "By the late 1980s, broad sectors of Mexican society from across the political spectrum -- including important segments of the ruling party -- agreed that Mexico had to begin a transition to democracy" (Hernandez and Fox, "Mexico's..., p.180). For the latter, what was particularly important was not only autonomy, but a shift from an almost exclusive focus on confrontational opposition to the construction of positive alternatives.

At the same time, changes were occuring in mass organizations, in part as a reaction to social and economic crisis and in part out of frustration with the political manipulation and objectification of the mass organizations related to the party/state. The development of greater internal democracy and autonomy at the base of huge organizations like the national teachers union was representative of a much wider process.

The relatively sudden emergence of support for an alternative national political option and the closely contested Federal election of 1988 was followed by an initiative on the part of the Finance Ministry to alter tax laws in a way that would threaten the existence and work of many civil associations. Threatened by loss of political control, the government moved -- with remarkable success -- to regain initiative, creating a National Solidarity Programme (PRONOSOL) under the authority of the President. PRONOSOL targeted social welfare and infrastructure projects, often to politically sensitive zones, emphased participation in its discourse and set up local committees whose link through the programme was directly with the President. Some progressive non-governmental and social movement figures joined PRONOSOL and its successor bodies. (Hernandez and Fox, pp. 200-7)

Initiatives like PRONOSOL gained significant time for the governing party/state system, but were not sufficient to do more than postpone the emergence of strong civic opposition at the municipal, state and federal levels, although they did assist the PRI in gaining the 1994 election.

Meanwhile, outrage at continued political repression and violation of human rights, frustration with one-party rule and desire for greater democracy fed the emergence of relatively new networks of civic action. Bringing together the Convergeance with Human Rights groups and regional rights organizations, the Alianza Civica emerged in the early 1990s as what became a country wide network dedicated to clean elections and enhanced voter education and civic participation. This activity was fed in part by the emergence of a significant network of local and national human rights organizations bringing together both church and secular bodies. From a mere four human rights NGOs in 1984, more than sixty had been created by 1991. Today many of them are associated in a national formation called the Red Mexicana de Derechos Humanos: Todo para todos.

The negotiation of the NAFTA provoked the organization of another significant association of civic bodies, in this case bringing together NGOs and social and labour bodies across sectoral lines, the RMALC (the Mexican Free Trade Network).

The municipal and state theatres of public action are important in evaluating the extent to which organized civil society is having effect. Fox and Hernandez note that the electoral contest in San Luis Potosi around the indepenent candidacy of Dr. Salvador Nava, led a number of the groups which had emerged in the late 80s to organize election observation and other attempts to increase democracy and transparency. The holding of neighborhood referenda on key issues by the Popular Defense Committee of Durango, and the emergence of business and civic dissent embodied in municipal and state victories for the PAN. The holding of a city-wide citizen-organized referendum on the future of democratic government for the city of Mexico in was a particularly strategic expression of the urge to democracy.

C. 4 Working definitions

In terms of legal and government relations two terms have been used to describe civic bodies, Institucion de Asistencia Privada (IAP) and Asociacion Civil (AC). To these might be added a new wrinkle recently defined by the government, Agrupacion Politica (AP) to refer to groups which while not parties and not nominating candidates are playing a political role. NGOs or organizaciones no-governamentales (ONGs) are a particular subset of these broader definitions, usually smaller, often supported with church or foreign funding.

A variety of other terms are useful in describing current organizational dynamics or in attempting to understand how Mexicans understand what is happening in their society. Movimiento social or social movement refers to those bodies who have significant mass participation, including many peasant, teacher, women's, indigenous and labour organizations. Organizaciones intermedios is a term used by some in the elite to describe how NGOs should be regarded and should function, i.e. as intermediate agents relating the state and the broad civil society.

The term sociedad civil organizada can be used in a whole series of ways. It can have a dry and descriptive content, referring to virtually everything outlined above. But as spoken by a Dominican priest working in northern Chiapas, a war zone, it is a phrase of hope, meaning and force. In a context of highly charged partisan, class and ethnic conflict, in which neither government institutions, parties nor security agencies merit trust, hope is vested in sociedad civil organizada as the 'salida', the agency of peace, the way out for ordinary citizens. It is fair to say that an official of the current state or federal government might not understand it in the same way.

C. 5 Explosion: the need to modernize the legal framework

No one interviewed differed from the conclusion that in Mexico in the 1990s we are witnessing an explosion of new groups and forms of organized civil society. It is relatively recent, it assumes all sorts of guises, while some aspects are legalized as civil associations (a.c., asociacion civil) or even as institutions of private assistance (i.a.p.s) probably the majority are not. Virtually all agree that this confronts not only the federal but state governments with a new challenge, one in which their first response is to ignore and their second to control. Virtually all interviewees agreed that to do nothing was dangerous. On the question of control, opinions varied from negative necessity (government insider), through enthusiastic regulators (legislative figures) to skeptical and careful reformers (philanthropic spokespersons) and outright resistance (local development and human rights figures).

Ignorance, fear and outright resistance:

An observer in the Canadian Embassy, reflecting on conversations with high-level counterparts in the Mexican government, cautioned against underestimating the persistent resistance of the Mexican state/party apparatus to non-governmental organizations and the participation of organized civil society in the process of governing. This concern was underlined by an interview with a government insider who detailed the intense suspicion with which a number of organizations are held, particularly in two dimensions -- the use of foreign funds and camouflaged involvement with opposition political parties. As a Mexican business leader put it "Colosio was one of the few who seemed to understand civil organizations and he's gone, so are most of his team. I'm not sure either the party or the government understand." But what they don't understand they wish to control, and as the same business leader pointed out, the controls are often arbitrary and "capricious". (Interview 5)

Can something be done?:

Mexican legislators have responded, somewhat slowly and very deliberately, to the issue of legal status of organized civil groups. The last three years have seen the establishment, first temporarily and now permanently, of a congressional Commission on Citizen Participation, together with a history of extended consultations and an examination of laws and precendents in other Latin American countries. The PAN government in Guanajuato has taken significant initiatives to make the process and operations of planning and government more open, accessible and transparent and some other states have made similar moves. The international discussion and innovation around more extensive civic participation in Latin America has grown, and some national instances -- the Colombian constitution of 1991 -- are far in advance of Mexican practice.

While some observers are skeptical of anything positive being possible, other figures urge the use of fraternal advice, example and pressure on the Mexican executive and the legislature. Should the balance of forces in the congress change significantly in July, this could be much more important than it is at present.

Enhancing the legal framework: Information:

Mexican legislators and officials as well as philanthropic and non-governmental organizations have expressed interest in Canadian laws and regulations (regarding non-profit incorporation,

charitable tax arrangements, etc.). A summary of legislation and practice could be shared, including comments on experience from such bodies as the Voluntary Sector Roundtable.

Advice and encouragement:
To what end should advice be offered? From the point of view of Mexican philanthropic and non-governmental bodies, three or four key points might be cited. Initiatives which should be considered include those:
1) that reinforce the idea that participation in formation and comment on legislation and in public planning, implementation and evaluation by organized civic associations is a normal, feasible and in fact advantageous to the process of effective governing.
2) that strengthen and professionalize civic associations will yield positive results in building national concensus.
3) that encourage laws and regulations governing the formation and operation of civic associations should be kept as simple, accessible and transparent as possible.
4) that reinforce those civic associations leading in these efforts, through bilateral relationships with Canadian organizations and through dialogues which bring together official, party/legislative, civil association and filanthropic figures around issues of reform and participation.

By what means should advice and encouragement be provided? Sensitivities at a state and individual level are important to keep in mind. The use of bilateral diplomatic, legislative and business conversations is important. The encouragement of governmental/NGO or legislative/NGO conversations as outlined below in section C.10 would contribute positively.

The support of specific meetings to review legal and procedural experience, involving Canadian and Mexican philanthropic and voluntary groups together with relevant government official or politicans would be useful.

C. 6 Lived experience: changing the atmosphere

While clarification and simplification of the legal framework for civil society organizations is important, the conduct and experience of organizations, their leaders and members, are much more directly affected by the day to day climate whether the atmosphere in the neighborhood or region or the actions and attitudes of bureaucrats or security personnel. Interviewees were very graphic and direct about this and about the urgent need for leadership from the top to change the atmosphere and reverse the climate of immunity for repressive and criminal actions.

There is a generalized concern with **increased violence:** the increased occurrence of kidnappings for ransom in Morelos, the concern for taxi and street robbery in Mexico City, the repeated remarks about intimidating and violent behavior by the police and by the military, the increased concern about the extent of military mandate and military presence in both urban and rural areas. At times people remark about the "Colombianization of Mexico"in the sense of a descent into institutionalized anti-social violence.

There are more specific charges that emerge when you speak with people active in peasant organizations or groups working in democratization or human rights as well as those prominent in political parties. Much of this material is documented in the work of Amnesty International and Mexican and Canadian human rights bodies, as well as independent observers like Andrew Reding, but a few examples may be useful:

* the **use of force by the police** to disperse the hunger-striking sanitary workers of Tabasco state from in front of the offices of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), January 19, 1997 and the alleged complicity of the Commission in the event. The symbolism as well as the actual occurrance reads vividly.

* Amnesty's report that there were **more urgent actions** from Mexico in 1996 than any other country of concern in the world.

* the increased violent intervention in community after community in northern Chiapas by **paramilitary forces** associated, organized and encouraged by government provoking a disintegration of communities, disruption and internal migration.

* the March, 1997 **arrest and beating** of two Mexican Jesuit priests in Chiapas.

* the mysterious **robbery** of computers and data from the national offices of the Alianza Civica in March, 1997.

* the conclusions of the U.N. Committee on Torture which conluded in April, that **the systematic practice of torture** continues in Mexico, especialy by federal and local judicial police.

* a campaign, encouraged by pro-government media, of **rumours and threats** against the leadership of CODEHUTAB (Comite de Derechos Humanos de Tabasco, A.C.), environmental groups and the Alianza Civica in Tabasco, including a colourful poster campaign alleging the receipt of "foreign gold" by such NGOs.

* the **expulsion of human rights observers** from Chiapas in April.

Amnesty International has cited particular concern for the **safety of human rights workers** as has the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America, a concern outlined by officials of the Canadian embassy.

In addition to the continuing significant elements of violence, threat and rumour, groups cite a disintegration of what limited confidence had been established in the **National Human Rights Commission** (CNDH). The treatment of the Tabasco hunger strikers is symbolic of the body's serious flaws. The U.N., reviewing the Commission's handling of more than 45,000 appeals lodged since 1990, concluded that its function has been extremely limited. According to Canadian observers, the Commission has never asserted any real independence of the government. According to Mexican academic critics, the Commission was set up to channel and control responses to human rights violations and has failed. According to Mexican human rights workers, the current leadership of the Commission is inappropriate and worthy of little or no respect and good people who might be expected to provide some assistance or confidence are leaving the Commission.

From the point of view of leaders in civil society organizations as well as foreign observers, the **attitude** of the Executive branch and the state bureaucracy are absolutely central to the atmosphere in which civil society organizations live. The situation is far from monolithic, but to the extent to which the Presidency and such Federal institutions as the Ministry of the Interior and the security forces continue with power, their actions both in terms of symbolism and as experienced in the streets are key. The level or inexperience, ignorance and suspicion of independent civil organizations and their role in democracy and society in general is at the core, as is the long history of clientalism and control which has characterized the past sixty to seventy years of governance in Mexico. Some important initiatives have been taken at the Legislative level, but it is too soon to tell whether these will emerge as significant recognition and enhancement of the participation of authonomous civic organizations in legislative and political prpocesses or simply another form of control.

Finally, the unwillingness or inability of the government to follow through on the San Andres accords and arrive at a **peaceful settlement** diffusing the roots of civil conflict in Chiapas and neighboring areas must be cited as a fundamental element in the negative atmosphere, particularly for human rights, indigenous and religious bodies.

Actions to indicate change

Canada should strongly encourage Mexico to bring the situation of civil conflict and violence in Chaipas to a peaceful resolution through negotiations and implementation of the San Andres accords.

- The potential for a role for third parties, both state and non-state actors should be tested, including the possibility of the use of human rights monitors under international authority benefitting from the Central American experience.

In bilateral relations with Mexico, whether at the Executive or Legislative levels, Canada should discourage further extension of the role and power of the Mexican military in civilian life in Mexico.

Canada should review its support for the enhancement of human rights mechanisms in Mexico and bilateral cooperation, taking into account the demonstrated weaknesses of the CNDH, and devoting resources to other forms of improved respect for rights, in particular the strengthening of indpendent human rights bodies and networks at the state and federal level. The potential for encouraging a strengthened role for legislative bodies and potential bilateral collaboration at t that level should be reviewed following the mid-term congressional elections.

Canada should continue to encourage actions by the Canadian embassy and Canadian official visitors to Mexico which encourage the recognition of the legitimacy and roles of civil society organizations and their contribution to democracy, respect for the safety and integrity of human rights workers and which emphasize Canadian opposition to continued human rights violations.

BUILDING BLOCKS

C. 7 New ground: the Barzon against the yoke of debt:

Nationally incorporated in June 1995, the Barzon represents something new on the organizational horizon in Mexico and perhaps in the Americas. Formally speaking it is the Civil Association Representing the National Union of Agricultural and Livestock Producers, Business people, Industrialists, and Service Providers. The name Barzon, which has become its short-form, refers to a yoke, an image drawn from a popular traditional song. (*) The yoke can bring forces together as when it links draft animals to a plough or vehicle, but it can also represent a negative weight. The movement, as its formal name implies, is a heterogeneous coalition of forces, transcending class and rural/urban barriers.

The roots of the Barzon are rural, originating in 1993 in the western state of Jalisco and the efforts of farmers to prevent their land being reposessessed by banks. The movement spread widely in rural states of the northwest where many farmers were suffering the effects of Salinas' rural policies and of the NAFTA, in addition to a series of natural disasters. The mobilization of members and the growth into an organization of middle class and commercial reaction was quickened radically by the economic crisis at the end of 1994. A period of speculative growth, represented in hundreds of thousands of over-extended credit card holders, home-loan recipients and consumers, crashed throwing debtors into radical insecurity.

A variety of causes forced thousands to face bankruptcy. The extent of the crisis, not only in financial terms but in terms of the classes and groups affected, limited the governments ability to use either repression or relief effectively. With personal loan interest rates jumping to 100% and those on credit cards to 120%, many were ready for an organization willing to attack "usury". As Heather Williams has commented: "The Barzon has captured social grievances in such a way that it is best described as a clearinghouse for complaints from producers and consumers negatively affected by the 1994 devaluation and the economic adjustments that preceded it." (Williams 20) The Barzon reached industrialists as well as poor peasants, and many "ordinary" debtors.

The Barzon has demonstrated a capacity for mass mobilization and organizing comprising offices and 250,000 members spread through all Mexican states. The organization has developed a creative and media-conscious range of public actions, bank occupation and farm-gate defenses which has maintained front page coverage for some time. It claims to have saved nearly 12,000 properties from auction, and has organized hundreds of lawyers in service of its members interests.

An organization of such size, born in a profound economic crisis, facing the complex demands of a multitude of sectoral interests has been forced to develop a more complex structure. The first full national assembly, held in Mexico City in June, 1995 created the "New Barzon" to distinguish the broader organization from its original rural orientation. Broadening its objectives from the defense of individual property, the new Barzon called for freedom of association for workers and business people, an end to usury by banks and

other lenders, a salary increase for all and an end to increases in the costs of public services. The movement attacked corruption in the judicial system, speculative capital, and technocracy. It pushed for national self-sufficiency in food grains, the renegotiation of NAFTA and the rights of Mexican migrant workers in the United States. The Barzon's membership manual, published first in 1996, includes a remarkably eclectic glossary of quotations drawing from Samuel Johnson, Will Rogers, J.M. Keynes and Abraham Lincoln among others. A pamphlet distributed in 1996 provides background for members on their rights according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Mexican Constitution and attacking usury as an attack on those rights.

The organization responded to increasingly complex challenges by forming, in November, 1996, a separate agricultural organization, the **AgroBarzon**, described as a conglomerate of agricultural producers from distinct social strata, dedicated to "achieving food sovereignty in Mexico, reactivating the productive plant, gaining and investing risk capital in diverse agricultural activities and solving the immense financial challenges of producers whether small, medium or large.

A field trip to visit Barzon groups in north-Eastern Oaxaca and eastern-Veracruz states took the author into Chinanteca indigenous communities and small *ejidos* formed largely of farmers who migrated to the area from other parts of Mexico following the destruction of the tropical forest a generation ago. These were small to medium producers, almost all with an interest in milk and beef production, although with a mix of other vegetable, rubber and fruit production.

The strength and enthusiasm of the organization at a local and regional level was impressive. People were clear on their needs, on their desire to improve their cattle feed and milk production and on the particular investments -- localized sugar refinery, refrigerated tanks -- that would assist them. Some university-advised base line surveys had been done, some project and programme proposals for existing federal agencies had been prepared and some capital secured. Additional training and organizational development, programme development and technical assistance are clear needs. The ideology of the movement places significance on "producers" and the dominant theme in conversations was akin to "give us the tools and we will finish the job".

At a regional level the organization is under significant stresses because of the urgency of the rural situation, the considerable and sometimes competing demands of the membership and the relative lack of previous experience in independent organizations. Ideas and projects are multitudinous, but knowledge of national and international sources of advice and assistance is quite uneven.

In the context of the continuing rural crisis and of the need to strengthen and deepen or "thicken" Mexican civil society, the Barzon, and particularly the AgroBarzon, is a case for special attention. The membership is extensive, and reaches deep into the rural back-country, including some indigenous people. The membership has a strong commitment to identity as producers and to the need to invest and improve their productive capacity. The

organization at a regional and national level has proven considerable creativity and strength.

Building equity in rural Mexico

A serious Canadian commitment to the defeat of poverty and growth of democratic civil society in Mexico should undertake a priority focus in rural development. The membership commitment, producer orientation and democratic autonomy of the AgroBarzon make it a strong candidate to be one of the organizations by which such an objective could be accomplished.

As part of the development of a Canadian assistance programme, with a focused effort on combatting rural poverty, support for the AgroBarzon through investment in organizational development and training enhancement for the organization at all levels, together with sustained support, in selected regions, for a programme of improved agricultural production with appropriate technical advice, surveys and support would be an excellent window for direct or indirect Canadian assistance.

C. 8 From central to forum to central: toward autonomy for labour:

For the first time in decades, Fidel Velasquez, the nonagerian leader of the official labour movement, did not attend the 1997 May Day celebrations. And the official day of labour celebrations were not held at the traditional site -- Mexico City's *zocalo* -- but in the presence of President Zedillo at the Auditorio Nacional. (The government and the Congresso de Trabajo decided to cancel the official *zocalo* celebration in 1995 in the midst of the economic crisis. Opposition groups formed an inter-union coordination for the 1996 zocalo event) While an estimated 10,000 joined the President at one end of the city, the Zocalo was in the hands of independent and dissident unionists estimated at from 20,000 to one million (the "concensus" of reporters noted by one daily was 60,000.) The latter celebration was the result of an accord between two relatively new labour groupings: the Foro El Sindicalismo ante la Nacion and the Coordinadora Intersindical Primero de Mayo. Leading figures included PRI militant and teachers union leader Alba Esther Gordillo and telephone workers head Francisco Hernadez Juarez. Mexico City PRD gubernatial candidate Cuauhtemoc Cardenas addressed the rally. The event involved some 58 unions and 26 social organizations.

The May Day events express a significant change in the institutional profile of Mexico's organized labour movement. Most important is the organization of the Foro El Sindicalismo ante la Nacion (Forum of Unionism Facing the Nation), formed by ten groups for the purpose of exchanging views and now comprising twenty-five member groups. Some members are independent and outside the Congresso de Trabajo, others remain members of the traditional union umbrella. While many of the leaders pertain to opposition political parties (the PRD and PT being the most evident at rallies), some remain important figures in the PRI. Important sectors of public workers, the teachers, the electrical and telephone workers and independent petroleum and fishery workers are involved.

The Foro has acted as a locale for discussion and reflection on current issues -- salary policy, employment, response to privatization and cut backs -- but is moving toward increased capacity to undertake joint action. The process of organizing participation in the 1996 and better-coordinated 1997 May Day events are a case in point.

From the point of view of political control and a history of clientelistic relations and often repressive manipulation of labour, the threat to the PRI by splits in its affiliated CTM and in the umbrella CT is extremely important, despite the fact that the position of neoliberal Presidents Salinas and Zedillo has been at times quite ambiguous with regard to the role of unions.

Whether or not the Foro will develop into a fully authonomous and separate labour central or federation is not yet clear, although the intention to do so is announced by one or another member from time to time. What is clear is that the monopolistic hegemony of the aging officialist leadership of the labour movement has been permanently broken. Nevertheless, the independent labour movement has a long road to travel before it can

play as signficant role in democratizing Mexico as its counterparts in Brazil or Spain. As Luis Hernandez writes recently, it "may be able to fill the Zocalo of Mexico City on May Day, but it has not yet shown the capacity to organize discontent." (Hernandez, "Sindicalismo...")

Nevertheless, the sort of developments represented in the Foro, indicate possibilities not only for autonomy but for modernization and democratic restructuring of the labour movement. There is considerable interest in professionalizing and training leadership and in strengthening international relationships. From a Canadian point of view, it should be noted that a number of Canadian unions, including the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP) , the United Steelworkers (USWA), the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) and the Canadian Teachers Federation have relationships with unions who are members of the Foro.

A further, independent but related, development worth noting has been the development of organizations to enhance the legal protection of workers rights and syndical organizations within the context of economic integration in the Americas. With diverse support from such bodies as the Autonomous University (UAM) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Mexican National Association of Democratic Lawyers brought together labour lawyers from around the hemisphere, late in 1996. Seven Canadians were among the 35 international participants.

Organizational development for autonomous unions

While the autonomy and independence of these syndical and professional bodies is key, both sectors cite needs for increased capacity in training and professionalization, increased capacity for the promotion and defence of core labour rights as well as the capacity to monitor and evaluate compliance with national and international standards and agreements. Support for such capacity enhancement could be developed by the Canadian government in cooperation with Canadian labour bodies and/or as part of an overall Canadian assistance plan for Mexico.

C. 9 The Alianza: from a citizens movement to citizenship

While democratization requires much more than transparent and competitive electoral processes, a flourishing democratic politics requires more than an up to date electoral law and effective political parties. Instrumental to the formal democratization process in Mexico has been the continuous and increasingly general pressure of citizens organizing to open up and clean up the process itself. Central to that effort has been the development of the Alianza Civica, which emerged in the early 1990s and has grown into a network reaching into virtually every Mexican state.

There has been, according to one of the Alianza's founders, a "revolution in expectations" in civil society in Mexico, one which transcends political parties and affects the nature of the system, of political practice itself. Part of this has to do with the engagement of people who were until very recently not part of the political "game" in Mexico, and certainly not part of the political "class". This has not happened without resistance. Not only indifference came from the traditionally empowered people but also new obstacles to paticipation. People are seeking a transformation in political culture, in the way in which decisions are made. They are seeking new roles of behavior. (Interview 3 and others).

There is a desire to experiment with new ways. People are quite shy at first, intimidated by the system. Then they say "why not". They gain experience but the experience needs to be evaluated and built on. There is always the chance that it will be frustrated and that cynicism and alienation will result.

The Alianza has addressed the existing political system in Mexico in a variety of ways including studies of electoral laws, media coverage, electoral financing; the organization of domestic and international electoral observers: public and press pressure for the reform of electoral laws and processes; public and press pressure against corruption and for transparency in governance and the behavior of public servants and elected officials. The Alianza has issued assessments of the relative cleanliness of recent Mexican elections, estimating violations of the electoral laws.

In the Federal election of 1994, Canadian civic observers or "visitors" were hosted by local Alianza groups in diverse locales in states like Morelos, Oaxaca and Nayarit. The local groups included teachers, lawyers, native people, religious order members and youth, many of them engaging in electoral politics for the first or second time and doing so with great enthusiasm and high hopes.

Many Alianza members in the Federal District were instrumental in organizing the citizen's referendum in the city which quickened pressure for a democratically-elected civic government, pressure which has now resulted in the first election for the governor of the Federal District, July 6.

The Alianza points out that someone has to fight for the rights of citizens in general, their desire to change the system as a whole, and that partisan parties are not up to or suited for

that task. The Alianza, in the opinion of foreign observers, has been an instrumental challenge for voter and participant education regarding the electoral law and proper practice as well as broader issues of democratic values and standards.

The size and complexity of the nation make the task of sustaining a nation-wide citizen's movement expensive and difficult. The suspicion and at times hostility of official bodies adds to the challenge. In March, 1997, the Federal authorities forbad the European Community to provide a sizeable grant for pre-electoral studies to one of the primary allies of the Alianza. The Alianza itself has found that with many foreign agencies and governments, grants for the day to day work of democratization are much more scarce than the rhetorical pledges of support for democracy.

In addition to sustaining and deepening the extensive network which it has developed, the Alianza remains committed to studies and pressure which will continue to enhance the transparency and democratic openness of key elements in the formal electoral process, in particular the financing of political parties and campaigns and the role and fairness of the media -- particularly radio and television -- in political coverage. Its continuing work against corruption and for transparency in high places remains a priority for support. Assisting the Alianza to make links and learn from the experience of similar movements and related groups in other countries experiencing democratization -- whether South Africa or El Salvador -- would also strengthen its development

Building citizenship: providing mortar

As part of its support for democratization in Mexico and enhancement of the electoral process, Canada should provide support for the further development of the Alianza Civica, for pre-electoral studies, observation, voter-education and organizational development. In view of the current sensitivities of the Mexican government, such aid may best be delivered through Canadian non-governmental partners.

C. 10 Civil society and development: the multilateral dimension

A number of bodies, not least among them the BID and the World Bank have been exploring forms which would enhance the engagement of civil society in national development, and bring civil organizations and NGOs more fully into partnership. In part these efforts are a response to pressures from the non-governmental community and the deliberation of NGO Advisory and monitoring groups related to the major multilateral organizations.

Foundation-like organizations (FLOs):

The Synergos Institute of New York has been encouraging the formation of private, non-profit non-governmental indigenously owned and operated funding organizations. Such bodies would provide grants, credit or other assistance to local NGOs and community based organizations, based on an endowment or other source of sustainable income. Late in 1996 Synergos sent a mission to Mexico to ascertain the possibilities of partnership in Mexico, consulting with Mexican foundations, the World Bank's Mexico Office and government officials.

As pointed out in their tentative conclusions, Synergos found that while the Bank, NGOs and some officials were keenly interested, "senior Mexican government officials will need to perceive the benefits of working with civil society, and take steps to create a more favorable enabling environment." Further, NGO representatives made it clear that a partnership could only be effective if the way in which social development is carried out in Mexico was changed to make it more efficient and responsive to local needs.

Synergos, CIVICUS and the Inter-American Bank (BID):

With the support of the BID, the Synergos Institute in cooperation with three national partners organized a series of consultations in Brazil, Colombia and Mexico aimed at dialogue toward a greatly strenthened civil society, working in partnership with government and business, successfully addressing regional poverty and social development. They hoped to identify new mechanisms which would allow civil society organizations to play a more active role in the design, planning and implementation of official development programmes funded by national governments and the bi-and multi-lateral lending and development institutions, as well as steps to strengthen civil society and its capacities to actively participate in national development.

While the Mexican government signed a letter indicating it had no objection to the consultation, the process turned out to be quite "complex". Several ministries were involved. As the consultation report put it "the process can present major challenges where thereis no clear consensus with the government on how to relate to civil society." Further, "those responsible...need to cultivate strategic allies within different parts of the federal executive power and also the legislature." The Mexican organizers proopsed to the government that a clear interlocutor for dealing with civil society representatives be established, and asked for clear and transparent policies to facilitate negotiations.

In the case of Mexico, the convening group -- Philos, A.C. -- working with a national coordinating committee brought together more than six hundred people early in 1996 in Guadalajara, representing civil organizations in 25 states, as well as national, state and municipal government officials.

The results of the meetings yielded quite concrete proposals for improved civil participation in social development at all levels, and relations between the BID and the civil society organizaions. They prioritized support for education, basic and municipal services and support to small and medium industries. They proposed the creation of a Civil Society Consultative Council to work with the BID country representatives, and the establishment of pilot programs to build experience of collaboration and participation.

At the same time tensions -- between Washington and Mexico City officials of the BID, between the Ministries of Interior and Finance over who supervises NGOs, between government and civil society organizations -- bedeviled the consultation.

Nevertheless, both Mexican NGOs interviewed and participants at the March Latin American Regional Meeting of CIVICUS expressed considerable frustration at the lack of advance in the process in Mexico. As one NGO spokesperson put it, when the people from Washington come to Mexico a three-way conversation -- multilateral, Mexican government, NGO -- is possible, when the leave the conversation ends. When consultation results were presented to the BID after Guadalajara the Bank responded that they could move very little without more forward motion on the part of the Mexican government and little concrete follow-up has ensued.

CIVICUS, Synergos and the national partners plan to continue, deepen and broaden the process of consultation throughout Latin America. Whether advances can be expected in the Mexican theatre may depend on the extent of political change, although other initiatives, as indicated below, might assist in opening up the atmosphere.

Citizen diplomacy: Making room for policy participation and lobbying

While Mexican NGOs have developed competency and sophistication with regard to domestic development and multilateral economic policy issues, the Mexican state has not yet adapted adequately to engage this capacity. Direct links to the Executive power, the Presidency in particular, have served accepted power groups, and others have been largely left out.

As Carlos Heredia and Ricardo Hernandez point out "the monolithic nature of the Mexican political party system has not allowed for domestic lobbying. Until very recently, it didn't make sense for NGOs to try to persuade legislators to vote in a certain way because the necessary conditions for lobbying to be effective are absent in Mexico. Principally, these are: a) the independence of the Legislative branch from the Executive branch (or the hegemonic power at the time: the military, drug traficker, the U.S. Embassy); b) accountability, or the assumption of responsibilities by legislators with respect to their electorate; c) a state of law and order in which the law is obeyed, and if it isn't, ther is an independent Judicial branch that can be called on."(Heredia and Hernandez, "Citizen..."p. 6)

To these conditions might be added the hostile attitude and inexperience, particularly of many in the Executive branch, to autonomous civil society organizations and their views. While a very limited initiative, several Mexican groups suggested modelling a different sort of behavior as a stimulus to change